

DPH Announces First Confirmed Flu Case of 2016-2017 Season at Drive-Thru Flu Clinic Vaccination Event

DOVER, DE – Today, Delaware's Division of Public Health (DPH) announced the state's first laboratory-confirmed case of influenza for the 2016-2017 flu season. The case involves a 27-year-old Kent County man who was not hospitalized. There are two main types of influenza (flu) virus – types A and B – that routinely spread in people and are responsible for seasonal flu outbreaks each year. Delaware's first case is an influenza A strain.

DPH made the announcement during the press event portion of a drive-thru flu clinic held in Dover, which served as the official kickoff of its 2016-2017 flu season prevention efforts. The free drive-thru flu clinic was conducted outside of the Blue Hen Corporate Center in Dover. It was the first DPH drive-thru flu clinic in Kent County, and is expected to be the largest. DPH nursing staff, joined by Bayhealth nurses, administered intramuscular flu vaccines. Local radio station Eagle 97.7 provided entertainment.

Following prepared remarks Governor Jack Markell received his last flu shot as Governor, from DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. Dr. Rattay and Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Secretary Rita Landgraf also received their flu shots. Governor Markell urged all Delawareans 6 months of age and older to get vaccinated soon if they have not yet done so.

"Getting your annual vaccination is easy and it's the single most important step every Delawarean should take right now to be prepared for cold and flu season," Governor Markell said.

“The evidence is clear that the benefits received from the flu shot saves lives, especially among our vulnerable residents, protects our workforce, and reduces costs across our healthcare system.”

The flu clinic, which provides vaccines to anyone ages 13 and older, also served as a preparedness exercise, enabling DPH staff to practice their readiness in the event of a large-scale health emergency, and test their ability to accommodate all people, including those with access and functional needs. Bilingual and sign interpreters were available, and special lanes existed for those with functional needs. People can stop by the Blue Hen Mall drive-thru clinic up until 4:00 p.m. today.

The 2016-2017 intramuscular flu vaccine protects against four strains of the influenza virus, which can be unpredictable and deadly. Last flu season, Delaware had 2,064 confirmed flu cases, six of which were fatal.

“The flu is easy to transmit and you can get it from healthy, but unvaccinated, children and adults,” Secretary Landgraf said. “With the announcement of the first confirmed case of the season, we want to remind Delawareans that they need the protection that an annual flu shot provides. Getting vaccinated can reduce the severity of flu illness and prevent visits to the doctor, clinic, or emergency room or missing important family, school, and work events.”

“Vaccination is about not only protecting yourself, but also protecting each other,” said Dr. Rattay. “If you’re not in a high-risk group, you likely live or interact with those who are, such as young children, older adults, or those with underlying health conditions or weakened immune systems.”

Dr. Rattay said it is especially important that older Delawareans and those with underlying health conditions get their flu shots early, preferably by the end of October. Those

among the most vulnerable populations:

- Seniors
- Pregnant women and their household contacts
- Caregivers and household contacts of children younger than 6 months, since those children are too young to receive the vaccine
- Those with chronic conditions or compromised immune systems
- Food service providers
- Health care providers.

“In Delaware, there are ample opportunities to receive the flu vaccine. From physician offices, to pharmacies, even the grocery store,” said Bayhealth Senior Vice President and Chief Nurse Executive Bonnie Perratto. “But some people are still in need. And events like this help bridge the gap so we can protect as many Delawareans as possible from the flu.”

Since it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body that protect against influenza virus infection, Delawareans are encouraged to get vaccinated before influenza begins spreading in their community. The flu vaccine is readily available through medical providers, pharmacies, and some grocery stores. DPH is hosting public flu clinics, including some with evening hours, at various locations. Finding a nearby flu clinic or vaccination site is easier than ever before. Google “CDC flu finder,” enter your ZIP code, and find nearby sites offering vaccinations.

Flu symptoms come on suddenly, and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and body aches, and fatigue. Some people get complications including pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections. Providers can prescribe antiviral medicines to make the illness milder, hasten recovery, and prevent serious complications, hospitalizations, and even death. DPH monitors the occurrence of influenza-like illnesses in hospitals, selected long-term

care facilities, and medical clinics to track flu trends in the state.

Delawareans can prevent the spread of the flu and other respiratory illness with good hygiene: wash hands often with soap and water, use hand sanitizer with 60 percent alcohol, and cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or aiming for your inside elbow. Stay six feet away from others who are coughing or sneezing, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Persons with flu-like illness should stay home from work, school, and other gatherings and not return until free of fever – 100° F (37.8° C), without the use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours.

For more information on influenza prevention, diagnosis, and treatment, call DPH at 800-282-8672 or visit flu.delaware.gov.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.